

Remember the Grieving Mom this Mother's Day

May 12, 2017 written by Julie Blackburn, LCPC, NCC, ATR



As Mother's Day is approaching, a number of thoughts come to mind as how this day is experienced by different people. This is my first Mother's Day as "Mom" even though I've held the title of Foster Mom for 4 other Mother's Days. The emotions in my heart remain conflicted this year yet for different reasons than in years past.

Mother's Day is a great celebration of women who have chosen to parent, struggled through sleepless nights with infants and teens, and are the angels on our shoulders with the voice of reason or guidance when we need it most. By Hallmark standards, that's what Mother's Day is about. Unfortunately, I am not alone in my conflicted response to Mother's Day – there is beauty, love and growing pains... And there is also sorrow.

Grief is not a usual first thought when one thinks of Mother's Day. However, if you are a grieving mother, it's part of your every day, especially on this holiday. Disenfranchised grief is when others do not recognize a loss. These women often experience disenfranchised grief because others are not acknowledging the loss due to celebrations, as if the mother/child relationship is not missed or didn't ever occur. Perhaps, the loss is avoided in hopes that the sorrow will not become a focus of the day, not to upset the grieving mother, or make visits uncomfortable for those who may be uncomfortable with emotions. If this day is to be about Mom, then bringing recognition to her role as a mother will not make her more sad, upset or longing for her child. On the contrary, it may just validate her feelings and help her celebrate her day.

There are All Types of Mothers Among Us

Recognize there are many women who have experienced profound losses and not every woman may be full of joy on the upcoming holiday. Grieving mothers may lack of enthusiasm, interest in participating in brunch or gatherings, or may appear tearful. This is a personal experience between the mother and the loss of their child, no matter the way in which the loss occurred. The lack of interest or enthusiasm or appearance of sorrow is by no means a lack of love or care for the other celebrating mothers, it's an expression of their own personal grief. These women need compassion, love, and acknowledgement on this day too.

Though there are many types of losses to acknowledge, I'd like to share a few types of grieving mothers.

- The bereaved mother lost an adult child, teen, young child or through miscarriage or stillbirth, only meeting the child while the baby was in the womb.
- Then there is the mother in waiting. She privately copes with medical procedures, tests and results, she may be waiting for her baby to arrive due to surrogacy, she may be waiting to deliver a baby for which she has created an adoption plan, she may be in the process of a home study to become a foster or adoptive parent, or she may just be waiting for the placement call for her new child.
- Mothers in the foster care system are unique and complicated with the transient nature of the system - one mother is providing daily care, while another mother is experiencing a loss of a child.
- Mother's of "lost" children are worth a mention as well. "Lost" refers to a child that may be absent for a variety of reasons such as missing persons, an estranged relationship, discord within the family, or a planned adoption.

Break the Aloneness by Remembering Her and Her Child

There are many ways to honor and support these women and continue to celebrate Motherhood. Talk to her about her grief or loss. This will recognize her role as a mother and lift the stigma of talking about the loss. She's already thinking about it. Then it becomes a shared loss, she is no longer grieving alone. If you are hosting an event, find ways to include the grieving mother and those that are no longer present in the family – set out pictures of the mother's with all their children (collectively or individually), set out a flower specifically for the child who is no longer present. I encourage you to get creative with your kindness.



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